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L E T T E R

T O T H E

Rev<sup>d</sup>. Mr. *John Wesley*,

Occasioned by his

ADDRESS to the Clergy,

FEBRUARY 6. 1756.

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By ONE of that CLERGY.

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A

LETTER

TO THE

Rev. Mr. John W. Wood

Occasional by the

ADDRESS to the Clergy

by the Rev. Mr. Wood

BY ONE OF THE CLERGY

LONDON

Printed by the Clergy and the People

in the Year 1800





A  
L E T T E R

To the REVEREND  
*Mr.* JOHN WESLEY, &c.



BROTHER WESLEY,

Had the favour of your *address* to  
I *the Clergy*, by your order sent to me,  
among the rest of your brethren  
and fathers; and do assure you, that I have  
no inclination to impute vanity or presump-  
tion to you, whilst you declare, "you are one  
of so little esteem in the church." Yet, you  
will allow me, upon a cool and sober view and  
review of your performance, to suspect you of  
being

being rather too credulous, when you say, "that you believe the great Bishop of souls required this address at your hands."—It will not be a just conclusion, I presume, though it has long been the burden of your Soul; especially, if it should appear from the spirit of your Letter, that it is by no means suitable to the spirit and genius of that Gospel, which truly contains the instruction of the great Bishop of souls. And yet, p. 4. "You say, you do not speak from a spirit of anger and resentment, much less would you utter one word out of contempt: a spirit justly abhorred by God and man."

But what may I think of your queries, p. 18. "Have I skill to draw the natural inferences deducible from each text? Do I know the objections raised to them, or from them, by *Jews, Deists, Papists, Arians, Socinians*, and all other Sectaries, who more or less corrupt and cauponize\* the word of God,"

Not to ask, how the *Jews* can, with propriety, be deemed sectaries? I should be desirous

\* To *cauponize*; to use the art of the Huxter or Vintner, who adulterates wines or fruits.



rous of knowing, why *Arians* and *Socinians* do stand chargeable with corrupting and cauponizing the word of God, any more than *Athanasians* are guilty? why are not they as expressly mentioned as *Arians* and *Socinians*? Or why are they classed with *Deists* and *Papists*? Are not the *Athanasians* altogether as nearly akin to *Papists* as they? nay, are they not much more agreed? And will not the *Deist* be able to shelter his infidelity much more plausibly under the extravagant scheme of the *Athanasian*, than under that of the *Arian* or *Socinian*?—Will Mr. *W.* say, that the *Athanasian* does not more or less, in his scheme, corrupt or cauponize the word of God? And if he does, then the same queries are as just and pertinent for the mouth of an *Arian*, or of a *Socinian*; “Have I skill to draw the natural inferences deducible from each text? Do I know the objections raised to them and from them by *Jews*, *Deists*, *Papists* and *Athanasians* and all other sectaries, who more or less corrupt or cauponize the word of God?”—What bar have you to this conclusion? No possible one, unless it be the abundant confidence of your own infallibility.

And

And truly, you have given no small occasion for this impeachment of your modesty and humility ; for your address is made up of a detail of abilities that qualify for the clerical labours. And these are both natural and acquired. You have specified *three* gifts and *nine* acquired qualifications. Some of which are again greatly compounded. Such as your *fourth*, which contains a knowledge of profane history, of chronology and geography ; and the *fifth*, has logic, metaphysics, natural philosophy, and geometry ; and even the *seventh*, has a discernment of spirits, added to a knowledge of the world.—What you mean when you say, “ what are all other *gifts*, whether natural or acquired, when compared to the GRACE of God ? ” is not so easy to understand. I should have thought, that a *good understanding*, would have belonged to the idea we entertain of the grace of God ; and that a *liveliness* and *readiness of thought*, a vigour of the intellectual capacities, might have been allowed in evidence of the grace of God ; and why a *good memory* should be excluded, I see not. Certain however I am, that



that when you mention the *second* acquired ability, you had before your eyes the most exalted display of the grace of God, ever made to mankind ; and that is, the *holy Scriptures*: the knowledge of which, you consider as an acquired ability. What, after this, you can mean by the *grace* of God, as a qualification, natural or acquired, or whatever else, I am not able to conceive: but shall leave you to be your own interpreter; who in this article, have thought fit to cover and envelope yourself in thick darkness. —

Allow me then to quit this survey, and to ask you, why you did not expressly mention a knowledge of arithmetic and trigonometry? Did you perceive there would be some difficulty in making *numbers* friendly to the doctrine, “ of three being no more than one, and one being no less than three?” Did you discern, that by the doctrine of triangles, the three angles of a right lined one, are but equal to two right angles; and that consequently, a triangle is no proper emblem or figure whereby to illustrate the Trinity?”

Possibly

Possibly you may despise these queries, and in your all-sufficiency entrench yourself; being so able to reduce an indirect mood to a direct, an hypothetic to a categorical syllogism. And besides your logical expertness, your metaphysical depths of knowledge, your understanding the subtleties of *Scotus* and *Aquinas*, will make you equal to every difficulty, and able to solve even the most palpable contradictions.

To call in question your ability, would not so well agree with the extraordinary account which you have given of yourself, and of your office. — You abate not the least of apostolical furniture. Nay, I much question whether many of the Apostles had all the qualifications you have made necessary; and which undoubtedly you suppose yourself in full possession of. You call yourself, an ambassador of *Christ*; an envoy from the King of heaven!" Nay, you modestly say, "you are taken from among, and ordained for men, in things pertaining to God," p. 28. which you have put in Italics, the better to signify and preserve



serve your emphasis, which can be no very convincing evidence of your profound humility: for the text is only found in *Heb. v. 1.* and applicable to every HIGH priest; not to priests in common, but to every *high* priest. Is there, *Brother Wesley*, no sort of vanity, no arrogance, no pride in this application? or is this a proof “that you do accurately know the literal meaning of every word, verse and chapter, without which, there can be no firm foundation whereupon the spiritual meaning can be built?” p. 7.

Less objection cannot well be made to your being “an Ambassador of Christ, an Envoy from the King of heaven.” The apostles were really such, and had their credentials accordingly. They had the extraordinary gifts of the spirit; but where are yours? They had full powers to publish and propagate the Gospel to the world.—The credibility of that Gospel was effectually established by their ministrations:—what then is left for you to do, that can, in any proper sense, denominate you an *Ambassador* of Christ, or an *Envoy* from the King of heaven?—The system of truth and mercy is

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handed down to us from their age, and without a possibility of men's changing the doctrine of the Gospel. And every man who can read, is as capable of judging for himself, of those sacred contents, as we are for ourselves. And so it was in the apostolic age, that these doctrines were only proposed to the examination of every man; for even they themselves had no dominion over the faith of any, but were helpers of their joy.

What then can you propose, either as an Ambassador, or as an Envoy? If you imagine you can bind or loose, condemn or absolve, you are egregiously mistaken.—You have no more authority, in matters of faith and conscience, than the meanest and most illiterate of your flock, whom you either feed or fleece. And whatever you may imagine of a spiritual power and jurisdiction; it is solemn trifling, and extremely arrogant and vain! for you are no authoritative judge of the heart of man. This, your boasted ability of discerning spirits, cannot possibly reach; whatever you may pretend. And it is quite ridiculous for you to talk of receiving the *holy Ghost*



*Ghost* at your ordination, any more than any other priest receives it at the hands of the Bishop under the rose: the *holy Ghost* given by the Bishop, is no other than a claim to church-benefices.—

And what if you have undertaken to rally the Clergy of the Establishment, because of their having a view to a competency, as *filthy lucre*? p. 22, 23. one might ask, not very impertinently, whether nothing like this ever stuck to your fingers? It would be a stretch of one's faith, to believe you absolutely clear from every regard to a competency, or even to a warm and comfortable livelihood.—

But here we have a fair opportunity of farther examining into your extensive and infallible knowledge of the holy scriptures; we shall see “how mighty you are in them, and how able to instruct, and to stop the mouths of gainsayers: how accurately you know the meaning of every word, verse, and chapter; how able you are to deduce the proper corollaries, speculative and prac-

tical from each text ; to solve the difficulties which arise, and to answer the objections which are or may be raised against it ; and to make a suitable application of all to the consciences of your hearers." For,

At p. 23. you arraign the Clergy of your own church thus : " was a comfortable livelihood then your motive for entering into the ministry ? and do you avow this in the face of the sun, and without one blush upon your cheek ? I cannot compare you with *Simon Magus* : you are many degrees beneath him. He offered to give money for the gift of God ; the power of conferring the holy Ghost. Hereby however he shewed, that he set an higher value on the *gift* than on the *money* which he would have parted with for it. But you do not : you set a far higher value on the money than on the gift, insomuch that you do not desire, you will not accept of the gift, unless the money accompany it."

Stay *Brother Wesley*, do not be too much in an hurry ; was you ordained without a *title* ? and did not that title imply some service, for which you was to be rewarded by money ?—



money?—Do not you likewise know that there is a wide difference between the church of Christ in the apostolic age, and the church of *England*? The Church of *Christ*, in that age, had no temporalities at all belonging to it; and it did absolutely reject and condemn all pretensions to any sort of alliance with this world. Its sanctions were none of them temporal. And to later times, to men of a quite different spirit and genius from the apostles, must we attribute the ecclesiastical improvements made by temporalities; the emoluments of power, title and riches.—With what face can you then pretend to put *Simon Magus* and us Clergy upon a level? The original ministers of *Christ*, his Ambassadors, his Envoys, had nothing at all to do with, what you call, *filthy lucre*: they were taught, and they taught others too, that *Christ's Kingdom* was not of this world. They did not preach up their own powers and preheminance, they did not advance any tenets to bend the knee, and demand the homage of an implicit faith, or a blind obedience; but they represented themselves only as the servants of men, in the service of Jesus.

Will

Will you then say, that there was any sort of resemblance between the holy Ghost which *Simon Magus* would have purchased, and that holy Ghost conferred by our Bishops, at our ordination? *Sir*, excuse me, our ecclesiastical constitution is confessedly CIVIL. The King is, over all persons and causes ecclesiastical and civil, SUPREME. And dare you then compare our thirst of livings to the sin of *Simon*?

But you venture to declaim very extravagantly. “ *O Simon, Simon!* what a Saint wert thou, compared to many of the most honourable men now in Christendom?” *Dear Brother*, where was your critical skill in the Scriptures? when it does not appear, but *Simon* wanted to make the purchase of the extraordinary gifts, in order the more effectually to enrich himself with the miracles that he would perform; he certainly wanted to lay out his money thus to the greatest advantage; he was entirely mercenary in his offer. *Peter* would never have reproached and condemned him, in the manner he has done, had his spirit been such as you would  
make



make it to be; or had he preferred the gift to the money. O thou infallible interpreter, it was nothing like it, and thou mayest learn from this single specimen of thy accurate skill in interpreting Scripture, that thou didst lye under a strange delusion in imagining, "that the great Bishop of souls did require address at thy hands."

Verily, *Brother Wesley*, upon this specimen of your accurate understanding, profound penetration, and critical knowledge, the world will roundly conclude, the high pretension of being an Ambassador of *Christ*, and an Envoy of the King of heaven, is but a piece of staring arrogance! and has nothing that can support the opinion, but that of your own lofty imagination.

Pray, what unlearned laic could not have made a much better judgment of the text, in the article of *Simon's* sin than you have done? Allow me to compare your remarkable reveries to the attempts of another *learned Teacher*, who laboured, with the profusion  
of

of his accumulated acquirements, to shew why the *Eunuch* did not bring his children along with him to be baptized? His acquaintance with geography was illustriously displayed, together with his knowledge of the world, of men, their maxims, tempers and manners ; after which, one of his audience, less learned, but more clear in his intellect, said, " Sir, you had no occasion to have taken so much pains to apologize about an impossibility, for who ever heard of a man having children, though castrated in his infancy ? " The learned textuary replied, " verily the Lord had hid it from me."

How do you think this man could have put on the front to his having *the key of knowledge*? how could he have presumed to *the discernment of spirits*? and to an accurate knowledge of the literal meaning of every word, verse and chapter, without which, you say, there can be no firm foundation on which the spiritual meaning can be built. Ah! *John, John*, dost thou want the triple crown? wouldst thou hold the vulgar  
in



in chains ; by disabling all at once from an ability of understanding the Scriptures ? would it be too severe to say to thee, in the similar style of *Peter* to *Simon*, “ thy vanity perish with thee, thou hast no part nor lot in this matter, but art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.”—The Gospel is no sealed book : an honesty of mind, without the literature you mention, will render any diligent examiner able to use the Scriptures to the saving purpose for which they are intended. And you widely mistake the preaching province, in affirming as you do, “ that an accurate knowledge of the literal meaning of every word, verse and chapter is necessary ; or that there can be no firm foundation on which the spiritual meaning can be built without it.”

The business of a christian minister is not to judge decisively of the Scriptures for any but himself ; he may propose his sense, and offer reasons to support that sense, but more ability he has not. His province leads him to recommend the sacred Books to the study of his flock ; to endeavour to recommend their plain,

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simple,

simple, and heavenly doctrines; and to enforce their excellent *moral* on the tempers and lives of men.—All his furniture may well be employed in such services: but as an authoritative judge of its sense, demanding the credulity or implicit faith of his audience, he is behaving quite out of character. And so far from deserving the honourable titles of *Ambassador* of Christ and *Envoy* of Heaven, he will never be able to shew, that either God or *Jesus* has signed or sealed his credentials: therefore your address, Sir, is wholly in the strain of priestly usurpation and dominion!

Let me then advise thee to learn more humility, to pull down the lofty thoughts, which thou hast of thine own infallibility; and be persuaded, that a popular enthusiasm has its imminent infirmities and dangers.—you have, at least, no better idea of the analogy of faith than your neighbours: and the appearance you would put on of charity, is but an appearance: which I have fully shewn, in the manner of your treating *Arians* and *Socinians*.—And if you will not be offended, I will whisper one thing in your ear, namely this, that  
although



although you have affected to place *Papists* along with *Jews* and *Deists*, there are not a few who strongly suspect you of squinting towards *Rome Papal*, in many of your observances.

Allow me to suggest two or three necessary things.

If we would approve ourselves in our religious ministrations, worthy the name of Protestants, we shall inculcate the importance of every christian's forming a judgment for himself of the Gospel instruction: because no man can be religious farther than he useth his own understanding; for all human authority in matters of faith and worship, is foreign to the nature of religion.

Next to this labour in the service of truth, we should recommend *charity*; which alone can become universal upon the principle, "that no truth is of any saving use or efficacy, but as it influenceth and produceth right temper and action." So that every man who is virtuous and regular in his temper and action, must be orthodox in his faith,

faith, whether he be of this, of that, or of the other denomination of christians. All saving faith is sanctifying; and no sort of faith can be found that is not practical. This consideration would unite christians, and reconcile all subsisting difference of speculation; this is to hold the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace; this will shew, how charity is the bond of perfection.

A farther advice, is, that you and I drop the word CHURCH, in all other senses but that, which will allow every honest man to be *equally* entitled to all the benefits of God's Kingdom, and that no sort of Clergy are more his lot and inheritance than the virtuous laity are; since the *truth* and *grace* of God have no limitation, in their divine direction and influence.

*I am,*

*Brother Wesley,*

*Your well-wisher,*

CLERICUS.